

Chapter 410. Employee Development

Subchapter 8. Payment for Attendance at Meetings

8-1. POLICY REGARDING ATTENDANCE AT PROFESSIONAL MEETINGS

a. **Need for exchange of information.** The rate of growth of scientific and technical knowledge over the past few decades has been extremely rapid. It has become increasingly difficult to transmit to those who need it the rapidly expanding body of knowledge in almost every professional field. The increasing responsibilities of the Federal Government in science, technology, and management make it imperative that departments and their employees keep abreast of significant developments in their fields of concern. It is similarly important that those in the Government inform others of the progress of their departments. These communication needs apply to those in administrative and managerial pursuits as well as those working within the various scientific, technical, and professional disciplines.

b. **Value of meetings.** Professional meetings and conferences are among the best means for communicating information about significant developments in ideas and knowledge. Effective communication of this kind has obvious value for the success of department programs. There are also other benefits. The opportunity for employee development afforded by participation in meetings concerned with managerial and technical matters is a significant factor in creating the kind of working atmosphere that helps to attract and retain competent personnel. Clearly, the professional growth of employees is a highly desirable goal. Departments' policies, therefore, should reflect a positive emphasis encouraging attendance at appropriate meetings so as to facilitate effective communication of ideas and information in areas significant to department operations.

c. **Criteria for department policies.** The significant differences among departments with

regard to program, functions, resources, workforce composition, size, and needs make it impractical to set a rigid standard for attendance at meetings and conferences. Certain general criteria should be considered in setting department policy to assure a consistent and constructive pattern among Federal departments. The following guides are suggested as a framework for the formulation and periodic review of policy statements to assure that the most effective use is being made of this vital link in the communication of professional knowledge. These criteria apply when attendance is on a basis other than that required as an official department representative.

(1) There is a clear affirmation of the desirability of attendance at professional meetings and the intent of the department to facilitate employee attendance.

(2) Use of travel funds to pay costs of attendance at professional meetings is clearly recognized as a legitimate use of such funds.

(3) A liberal standard is followed for authorizing attendance at meetings without charge to leave when travel funds cannot be provided.

(4) A broad definition is used in defining:

(a) The relation of department functions to the agenda of professional meetings.

(b) The probable impact of attendance on the conduct, supervision, or management of department functions.

(c) Eligibility for attendance.

(5) Department procedures facilitate attendance in the following manner:

(a) The authority to approve attendance is delegated as far as reasonable management controls permit.

(b) Requests to attend meetings are handled expeditiously.

(c) Restrictions on the numbers who may attend a particular meeting (and other

such limitations) are sufficiently flexible to accomodate special needs.

- (d) A reasonably wide distribution of opportunities is provided among those who are eligible and would benefit from attendance at meeting.

8-2. PAYMENT OF EXPENSES AUTHORIZED

Departments are authorized under section 19(b) of the act to pay from funds available for expenses of travel, expenses incurred for attendance at meetings related to their functions and activities. Payment is also authorized for attendance at meetings which will contribute to improved conduct, supervision, and management of those functions and activities.

8-3. USE OF AUTHORITY

This authority to pay expenses incurred for attendance at meetings is in addition to the training authorized by the Government Employees Training Act. It is not subject to the special requirements which the act establishes

for training. Moreover, it is broader in that it applies to Foreign Service personnel and Presidential appointees. Departments must determine when it is appropriate to use the "meeting" authority to pay expenses and when it is appropriate to use the "training" authority. It is not practical to establish a definite, generally-applicable rule for distinguishing between "meetings" and "training" as these terms are used in the act. The distinction is one which must be made in light of the varying facts and circumstances that exist in individual cases. For example, consideration may be given to the announced purposes and methods of the program offered; the department's purpose in authorizing its employees to participate; the definition of training given in the act; and the language of the act with respect to meetings. The decision is one for administrative determination by the department. Unless it is obvious that the meeting authority is being used when the training provisions are clearly applicable, the Commission will not question a department's determination on this point.